

The Promise

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Summary: The details of Sheba's second kidnapping, and the connections she forms in the process. (One-shot.)

***Chapter 1*: The Promise**

Inspired by something that tumblr user waffle-sorter posted in the Golden Sun tag. Not betaed, so all mistakes are mine.

This is a small detail, but Aisha is the name that I gave to Sheba's adoptive mother, aka Faran's wife.

On the three-month anniversary of her kidnapping, Sheba was informed that she was finally going to be taken back home to Lalivero. She practically inhaled her breakfast and when her escorts came to collect her, she hugged her caretakers and left without looking back. As they traveled she made a list in her mind of all the things she wanted to tell her parents about—how even though Lord Babi's own chefs had prepared meals for her during the course of her stay none of them could compare to the fish filets Faran made, or how every night as she failed to fall asleep she'd recite the nursery rhymes Aisha used to sing to her when she was a child.

The two guards seemed nice enough, if eccentric. One of them spoke in a deep, scratchy voice, to the point that Sheba wondered if he'd had a single drink of water in all his life. The other clung to a compass as though it was a lifeline, and was more focused on it than he was on the road in front of him. But they didn't try to make crass comments at her like some of Babi's other guards, so she gave them the benefit of the doubt.

They took a horse-drawn wagon from Tolbi to Suhalla, which shortened the journey to only a few hours. From her seat inside the wagon, though, she overheard the guards worrying about the ability of the horses to cross the desert,

so she wasn't surprised when the scratchy-voiced guard stuck his head in and told her they'd have to walk. It struck her as a little odd, because when she'd initially been brought to Tolbi they had little problem crossing the desert on horseback. But she was just so excited to be going *home* that she nodded and said "Whatever you think is best."

There was a tiny town at the outskirts of the desert, so the horses and wagon were left there. The instant they entered the desert, however, it became clear that something had changed in the last few months. The wind was strong, abnormally so, throwing sand every which way and obscuring vision farther than a few feet in any direction. Sheba, out of a sense of self-preservation, stuck close to the man with the compass, because even if he wouldn't look up, he at least knew the general direction they were headed.

"Do you think it's getting worse?" Scratchy said to Compass, having to raise his voice to be heard above the wind.

Compass shrugged. "Could be. We've been walking for an hour, though, it should be winding down soon."

The wind kicked up a few notches.

Sheba felt her stomach twist. Lalivero was seeming farther away by the minute. Her legs shook under her and she stumbled.

"Be careful," Scratchy said, starting to reach out to catch her and stopping himself short, like he was afraid to touch her. "One of us can carry you, you know."

"No, thank you," she said, hunching her shoulders and soldiering forward, trying not to inhale the sand as it whipped past her, stinging her cheeks.

A few minutes later, Scratchy spoke up again. "It's definitely getting worse."

Compass glanced up again—Sheba noticed he was having to hold his device closer to his face now to be able to read it. "Yeah. We're about halfway through, though, so if we can just—"

The next gust of wind was so strong, Sheba actually felt her feet lift off the ground, as though it were a massive hand pushing her over. Compass, using what looked to be all the strength in his body, shoved her away from them and towards an outcropping of rock. There was a sharp pain in the side of her head, and as her vision started to fade to black, as she watched Compass and Scratchy literally being blown away by the massive sandstorm, she could have sworn she felt raindrops on her face.

She couldn't say how long she was out, but when she woke it was to the light pressure of a hand on her head and the rushing sound of the wind, although she could no longer feel the sand pelting her.

"She's awake," a voice said, and she opened her eyes to see that it was a man with long, blue hair and eyes to match. "Feeling better? That rock really did a number on you." His voice was smooth, like a river.

"Yes...thank you. You healed me?" She sat up gingerly, and took in the rest of the group standing around her, in the shelter of an outcropping of rock. An old man, a girl and a boy who looked roughly her age, and two...not-quite-humans. She touched the side of her head where she thought she'd hit it, but felt no bandages. She turned to the blue-haired man in confusion.

"It's the power of my clan," he said, offering her a half-smile and a hand to help her up. "I believe you have a similar power. Perhaps something with the wind?"

She took his hand and used it to pull herself up. "I don't know what you're talking about," she said, as she attempted to read his mind. His smile widened, becoming almost feral.

"Ah, and that confirms it," he said, and she jerked her hand away with a gasp. "You are Sheba of Lalivero. I am Alex. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

"How—how could you—?"

"Adepts can sense when Psynergy is being used by someone else," he said. "Your little party trick is no exception. And I can promise you, you won't enjoy the things you see in my mind."

"Alex, do you want to stop being a jerk for maybe five seconds?" the girl snapped, stepping forward to stand between them. Alex sighed and raised his hands in a surrendering gesture.

"As you wish. But may I suggest that we press onward? Time is of the essence."

The girl turned to her. "Are you okay? You're not dizzy, or anything?"

Sheba shook her head, suddenly not trusting herself to speak.

"Off we go, then," Alex said, walking past them to join up with the two inhuman ones, who had already begun to leave. Sheba followed along behind the girl, who turned to speak to her after a moment.

"I'm Jenna. Welcome to the hostage situation."

"Hostage situation?"

"Yeah. You're being kidnapped."

"Again?!" Sheba blurted, before she could stop herself. Jenna raised an eyebrow. "I was kidnapped by Lord Babi, and I was being escorted home before all this happened..."

Jenna's face, Sheba was surprised to find, held empathy. "I'm really sorry. I'd offer to help you escape, but I'm a hostage myself. And with this crew, I can't say I'd recommend an escape attempt anyway."

"You think they'd hurt me?"

"Those two might," Jenna said, nodding towards the non-humans. "They're Saturos and Menardi, from a town called Prox. It's so far north it's probably not on any map you've ever seen."

Sheba nodded. "And the others?"

"The old man is Kraden. He was formerly a pupil of Lord Babi, and his knowledge is why they're keeping him around. And the guy with the ponytail is my brother, Felix."

"So he's a hostage too?" she guessed, but Jenna looked away.

"It's...complicated."

"Oh," Sheba said, quietly, but to herself she wondered what on earth that was supposed to mean. You were either a hostage, or you weren't. How was there any sort of in-between there?

As they walked through the rest of the desert, Jenna explained the situation. Her parents had been kidnapped by the Proxians, and they were being held captive until all the elemental lighthouses were lit. Sheba was familiar with the lighthouses of course, with Venus Lighthouse being so close to her hometown. Jenna did not, however, go into much detail about how Felix figured in to all of this. But the older boy seemed to do what Saturos, Menardi, and Alex told him without complaint, while barely sparing a glance to her, or to his own sister. So Sheba, for the time being, placed his alliances with the kidnappers. Better safe than sorry, Faran always said.

They made it out of the desert without any further incident, and Alex spoke up to the group at large. "We may have trouble trying to get through Suhalla gate without permission. Security has increased due to the construction of Babi's lighthouse."

Saturos grunted. "Alex, you know they won't stand a chance against us."

"It may be smarter to attempt to talk our way out of it..." he began, but Saturos glared at him, and he smiled in a placating manner. "Very well, I merely meant it as an alternative in case you wanted to conserve your energy. The lighthouse will be treacherous to climb, especially with yet another person in tow."

Menardi turned to her. "You can't fight, can you, girl?"

Sheba's knees threatened to buckle. "No, I—I don't think so."

"What good is a woman that can't fight?" She scoffed. "Very well. Just stay out of the way if anything happens. We can't waste time finding another Jupiter Adept."

Sheba nodded weakly, and felt Jenna grab her hand. "Don't worry," she said, as Menardi stalked away. "Felix will make sure you don't get hurt."

"Felix?" Sheba repeated, and Jenna must have heard the doubt in her voice.

"He doesn't want you involved. It would kill him if you were hurt because of something you shouldn't have even been part of."

Sheba hadn't seen the two siblings speak to each other once so far, so she wasn't sure exactly how Jenna knew her brother's feelings on the matter. But she settled with just nodding her head and following the others, discreetly studying Felix as they walked.

He was tall with a slender waist and hips, but he had broad shoulders. His gloved hands were fidgety, flexing open and closed and worrying at loose threads on his clothes. She wondered if he was nervous about something. She would've loved to read his mind, but didn't want to try and guess at his reaction. Even in spite of Jenna's apparent faith in him, Sheba had learned the hard way not to trust anyone until they proved they'd earned it.

They'd arrived at Suhalla gate before she knew it, and a guard stopped them once they reached the top of the stairs carved into the rock.

"Do you all have pa—wait, don't I know you?" The guard leveled a finger at her, squinting, trying to place her. "I know I've seen you before."

Sheba didn't know what to say. Luckily, Alex stepped in. "I'm afraid you wouldn't, she's from quite far away and doesn't

speak the language here. If you'll excuse us, we're in a bit of a rush."

"Now, hold on, I haven't seen your papers," the guard said. "My own fault, I got distracted. If you'll just provide those, you can be on your way."

"We were sent by Lord Babi to oversee the construction of the lighthouse," Alex said, offering another attempt as Saturos tapped his fingers on the hilt of his large sword. "In fact one of his scholars, Kraden, was sent along with us to ensure that everything is proceeding as planned."

"He sent a person, but didn't bother to get you papers?" the guard said. "Hold on, I'll have to get my supervisor."

"We don't have time for this," Saturos snarled, drawing his sword and slashing across the guard's chest before he even had time to react. Sheba screamed, and several guards further away looked up at the sound, breaking out into a run when they saw the slain man before them.

"And now you've attracted the attention of the others," Menardi said, advancing towards Sheba with a glare. Felix, however, stepped between them.

"Menardi, don't."

She slapped him across the face without hesitation. "How dare you stand in my way." She looked as though she'd been about to continue towards Sheba again, but Saturos shouted her name from the midst of the fight, and she sighed. She shot Sheba another glare, and said "Count yourself lucky, child," before turning on her heel and joining her partner.

Felix watched her go, and Sheba found herself completely unable to identify the look on his face. Surprising,

considering that even without the aid of mind read she was usually able to read expressions with ease.

"I'm sorry," she said, voice wavering, and when Felix turned to her she could see the red mark on his face from Menardi's hand. Light green sparks played around the red spot, and Sheba recognized it as his Psynergy, healing him.

"Better me than you," he said simply. Sheba was surprised to hear gentleness in his voice, having expected a harsher tone.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said." He shrugged. "I'm used to it, so I'll take the blows for you if it comes to that."

Sheba's mouth dropped open. First he took a hit meant for her, and then he offered to do it again in the future?

"...You don't believe me," he said after a moment.

"Would you?" she challenged, and he let out a small, humorless laugh.

"No, I wouldn't." He paused, then stretched out a hand to her. "Here, read my mind."

"Just like that?" she said doubtfully, even as she took a step closer to him.

"Why not," he said, still holding his hand out. She crossed the remainder of the distance between them, placed her hand in his, and stepped into his head before he had a chance to change his mind.

What she found there filled in all the pieces that Jenna had left out of her earlier explanation. Felix's own unwilling journey to Prox, his training under Saturos and Menardi, his regret at Jenna (and now Sheba herself) becoming involved in the whole mess... There was a lot of regret, and anger—not just at Saturos and Menardi, but at himself as well.

She released his hand and stepped away, shaking her head a little in an attempt to clear his emotions from her mind.

"I believe you, now," she said. "But this doesn't mean we're friends."

"Of course not," he said. "We don't have to be friends for me to keep you safe."

"Keep me safe..." she repeated, incredulously. "You're *horrible* at this captor job."

The corner of his mouth quirked up into a small, but genuine, smile. "That I am."